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C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 000101

SIPDIS
NSC FOR MGAVIN, LETIM
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU
INR FOR OPS/EPITTERLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/09

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ICRC](#) [CD](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: French Ambassador Reports Release of Darfur Hostage

REF: A. 09 KHARTOUM 1146; B. 09 KHARTOUM 1173; C. 09 KHARTOUM 1218
[D](#). 09 KHARTOUM 1360

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert E. Whitehead, CDA, Department of State; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: French Ambassador Nicoloso informed CDA on February 7 that a French aid worker at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), held hostage in Darfur since November, 2009, had been released. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) French Ambassador Nicoloso told CDA on February 5 that there was a possible breakthrough in the case of four kidnapped French aid workers being held in Darfur. In a subsequent conversation on February 7, Nicoloso informed CDA of the release of one hostage, an ICRC agronomist named Laurent Maurice, who had been kidnapped in Chad on November 9 and brought across the border into Darfur, where he was held for nearly three months. Three other French nationals are still being held hostage in the Darfur region, including another ICRC worker, one Gauthier Lefevre, who was kidnapped in a separate incident on October 22 (Ref. C, D). Maurice is reportedly in good condition.

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador Nicoloso told CDA that he had met with President Bashir to thank him for the efforts of Government of Sudan (GOS) negotiators who had arranged for the release. He was accompanied to the meeting by French Presidential Advisor for Africa Parant. Nicoloso did not divulge details on the negotiations, including whether any ransom had been paid. However, in a prior conversation with CDA (Ref. C), Ambassador Nicoloso had speculated that the GOS might make some sort of in-kind payment to the tribe involved in the kidnapping, in order to secure the release of hostages. (Note: After the release of Mr. Maurice, ICRC officials and a spokesman for the hostage-takers made statements to the press denying that any ransom had been paid, but a GOS official did allow that "logistical help" such as vehicles and fuel had been provided during the mediation. End note.)

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: There is general consensus among the humanitarian community that security on the Chad-Sudan border is deteriorating, and that additional abductions will occur. According to a number of international government and non-government officials involved in the hostage negotiations, the rash of kidnappings in Darfur has been motivated by greed, not politics. The timing of Laurent Maurice's release from captivity was opportune, occurring just days before Chadian President Deby was scheduled to arrive in Sudan. End comment.
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